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A RARE PERSIAN PLAQUE

The Museum has acquired a large Persian plaque of the seventeenth century, covered with the rare and highly prized celadon, or martabani glaze, which is believed to be the finest example of its kind in this country.

The word "Cèladon" has come to be extensively used to indicate a sage-green or sea-green color, which is found on stoneware and porcelain produced in China, and pottery made in other eastern countries. It was derived from the name of a character in a pastoral romance, entitled "L'Astrée," written by



LARGE POTTERY PLAQUE
Celadon, or Martabani Glaze With White Pate-sur-Pate Traceries
White Star With Blue Design
Persian, Seventeenth Century

Honoré d'Urfé early in the seventeenth century. Cèladon, a shepherd, was represented on the stage in a grayish-green costume, of the same tone as the ancient green-glazed wares to which reference has been made.

The Chinese name for this peculiar green glaze is *ch'ing t'su*, while the Japanese call it *seiji*. The Arabs and Persians have given it the name "Martabani," for the reason that the ware of this character was originally supposed to have been made at Martaban, in ancient Siam.

Cèladon stoneware was produced extensively at several places in China during the Sung (960-1279) and subsequent dynasties—at K'ai-fêng-fu, in Honan; at Lung-ch'uan-hsien; at Ch'u-chou-fu, in the province of Chekiang; at Liu-t'ien; also in Corea and Siam, and more recently in Canton and Ching-tê-chên, China, and in Japan.

Many theories have been advanced as to the origin of this so-called "green porcelain," which, in the middle ages, found its way into every corner of the Old World. Learned writers have produced exhaustive treatises to prove that it was of Arab manufacture, or that it was produced at Martaban, or other places. It apparently never occurred to these theorists that they could learn the truth by approaching the subject in a more direct way, by studying the composition of the wares themselves. Such an investigation would have convinced them that the heavier and harder pieces of vitrified stoneware could only have been made by the Chinese potters, and that the soft, porous pottery, covered with a seemingly similar glaze, originated in Persia. Further investigation would have revealed the fact that the glazes of these two varieties are of a totally different nature, that of the Chinese ware being of a porcelaneous character, while the coating of the Iranian product is a true silicious glass, almost identical, except in the coloring, with the cupreous glazes of the Egyptian Ushabti, or sepulchral figures.

As early as the end of the twelfth century the belief became current in India that dishes of this green-glazed ware would fly into pieces when touched by poisonous liquid; in Persia, at a later date, popular superstition invested it with a mystic quality whereby it would change color at the contact of poisoned food. In India and Borneo the same ware, under the name of *Gudji Blanga*, was supposed to possess medicinal virtues, and the puissant property of warding off evil spirits.

So-called cèladon glaze, while applied by the Chinese potters indiscriminately to stoneware, pottery, and, at a later period, to true porcelain, is most pleasing when used as a glaze for the softer bodied wares. White porcelain shows through the tinted glaze and gives it a paler and harder appearance, but when used on pottery the full rich quality and color tone of the glaze appear to the best advantage.

While it has been stated that large quantities of "Martabani," or green-glazed pottery, were produced in former centuries in Persia, examples of Iranian ware of this variety are now exceedingly rare. The peculiar tint is particularly adapted to glass glaze, which was used by the Persians to coat their soft, buff-colored earthenware.

The plaque recently placed on exhibition in the Museum collection measures eighteen inches in diameter. In the centre is a reserved white eight-pointed

star of the size and shape of a Persian tile, bearing a blue design representing a conventional dragon. The remainder of the surface is covered with a deep celadon glaze on which are white *pâte-sur-pâte* paintings of conventionalized carnations and leafage. The marly, or rise, of the dish is corrugated or ribbed. The combination of these three styles of decoration in one piece—Martabani glaze, overdecoration of *pâte-sur-pâte*, or white slip tracteries, and underglaze blue painting on white ground—is one of the rarest to be found on old Persian pottery.

E. A. B.



NOTES

RELABELING—The printing of the new labels for the collections of Chinese porcelains has been completed. . . .

EXCHANGES—Arrangements have been perfected for the exchange of publications with all of the prominent museums in this country and Europe, and the Museum library will receive copies of everything published by these institutions hereafter. Already a large amount of literature has been received. . . .

NEW PUBLICATIONS—A revised edition of the Museum *Guide* has been prepared and is now in press. This new handbook has been made necessary by the extensive changes which have been made in the arrangement of the collections during the past year.

A new series of Souvenir Post Cards is also in course of preparation and will soon be issued. . . .

NEW CASES—The Museum carpenter has finished two additional exhibition cases of large size, in which the Chinese and Japanese lacquers have been installed. . . .

NEW MEMBERS—Since the appearance of the October number of the BULLETIN, new members have been elected, as follows:

LIFE MEMBERS

MRS. JOHN JOSEPH ALTER	R. WINDER JOHNSON
SAMUEL P. AVERY	JAMES J. RYAN
B. FRANK CLAPP	

ANNUAL MEMBERS

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